

# RNA News

The official journal of the Rochester Numismatic Association

March - April 2012

## MUSINGS FROM THE PRESIDENT

We've reached a big MILESTONE as a club - our 100th anniversary! CONGRATULATIONS not only to all of us who continue club traditions, but also to those before us who established those traditions. Keeping something going as others outlined before us is both easy and hard. Easy, because there is a prescribed path to follow; and hard because we are following a course prescribed for us by others. As I have noted before in my musings, we have in common many different but also similar collecting habits. Some of our past members had interests in LARGE cents; now, some of our members' interests are small cents. But wait - we just had a presentation on LARGE cents. Gold and Silver are the same as 80 or 100 years ago, but we had to endure a period where Gold was not an option for most collections. Silver is not standard in US coinage anymore, with the exception of a few collectibles and bullion pieces. Wouldn't it be nice if we could reach into our pockets and pull out a hand full of silver like the past members could do and did everyday? For nostalgic purposes I have carried a 1912 silver half dollar in my pocket for the entire time I have been our president, hoping some of the past can be part of our future. But just being myself - and all of us being ourselves - will create something for future members to look back upon, too. Just as you and I look back to our predecessors, in time others will be looking back on us, too. So, let's be sure we present something that we would want future members to see. From my point of view, we are doing well as a club, and the education part of our meetings is a key to what we are. Congratulations and please keep it going for others to look back upon from future Rochester Numismatic Association milestones.

Chip Scoppa #100

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## A Tale of Two Auctions—Part I

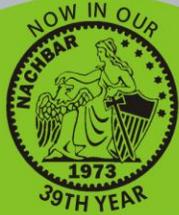
By Steve Eisinger, RNA President - 2010

As everyone knows, the RNA holds an auction after every meeting. The auction waxes and wanes in quality, quantity, and interest over the months and years. In recent times I have heard some dissatisfaction expressed with it, which I share. What is wrong with the auction, if anything? Is the RNA Auction good for sellers or buyers, or both, or neither? How does it compare to other auctions readily available to RNA members? What, if anything, should be done to “fix” the auction? These are my principal issues.

I will compare the RNA Auction with the Hessney Auction. Hessney's Auction House just outside of Geneva holds coin and stamp auctions periodically.

I assembled some hard data on both of these auctions. Perhaps some of you have noted that I have been busy scribbling down prices and “back-to-the-box” during recent RNA Auctions. I have done the same for Hessney's. To my knowledge, no one in recent memory (or perhaps ever) has attempted an objective and unbiased analysis of these auctions. Here, in Part I of my report, are the results of my data collection. Part II will be my analysis and Part III will be my conclusions and suggestions which, I am sure, will be enriched by all of the opinions that I hear from you, the members.

(Continued on page 3)



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(Continued) **The RNA Auction** occurs after every meeting; thus there are 20 auctions per year. Technically, it is not part of the RNA meeting at all, to avoid any possibility of tax complications. Thus the meeting itself is adjourned before the auction starts. Members may present as many as 10 lots to sell, placed on green felt trays, with two copies of the offerings and prices posted with the tray. Trays are set out on a “first-come” basis, and traditional wisdom holds that it is better to have one’s offerings earlier in the auction rather than later. The auctioneer goes through the trays in order. Non-members may bid on items, but may not place items in the auction. Sellers usually place a “reserve” or minimum bid on each item. There is no “take” by the club. In other words, all the money realized from a sale goes directly to the seller. However, not uncommonly, donated items are auctioned off “for the good of the club.” Cash is expected from the buyer at the time of purchase, but for large purchases, a check or even an IOU is often offered by the buyer and accepted by the seller, in the spirit of friendship and trust.

An auctioneer, a treasurer, and a runner are the requisite staff to run the show. A few members informally rotate the auctioneer duties, and they are generally humorous; they often comment knowledgeably on the material; but they do not attempt the traditional auctioneer’s riff. There are anywhere from two to ten or more trays of items, and the auction takes anywhere from a few minutes to 45 minutes or so. Two “big” auctions are held per year, at which the auction replaces the presentation. Typically about two-thirds of the attending members stay for the auction and the rest slink away gradually, making a crowd of eligible bidders of about 20 to 30 people. Bidding can be furious, or more commonly desultory or non-existent. Whenever bidding suddenly becomes competitive, someone is sure to joke that for a moment he or she thought he was attending an auction.

Material runs from the ordinary numismatic stuff to the unusual, to junk. About five to ten percent of material is not strictly numismatic, but is jewelry, stamps, old photos, books, memorabilia, novelties, etc. Numismatically, things get really interesting when someone is liquidating a long-held collection.

I collected data from 7 auctions starting with our first meeting in the fall of 2011. Here are the numbers:

#### **Data from 7 RNA Auctions**

Total number of items	513	
Total number of items sold	199	39%
Total number of items unsold	314	61%
Number of items sold at minimum bid	129	25%
Number of items sold at up-bid	70	14%
% of items sold that is up-bid		35%

#### **Data from 3 RNA Auctions (including the “Big” December Auction)**

	<b>\$ Amount</b>	<b>Average per Auction</b>
Total value of auction (sold and unsold)	\$5777	\$1926
\$ Amount of items unsold	\$4327	\$1442
\$ Amount of items sold at minimum bid	\$919	\$306
\$ Amount of items sold at up-bid	\$531	\$177
Total Take	\$1450	\$483
% of total value represented by take	25%	
Average price of unsold items		\$33
Average price of items sold at minimum bid		\$13
Average price of items sold at up-bid		\$12
Range of unsold items	\$1-\$360	
Range of sold items	\$1-\$100	
Number of unsold items priced at > \$100	13	

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**Hessney's Auction House** ([www.hessney.com](http://www.hessney.com)) is on Route 14 between the New York Thruway and Geneva, about 38 miles from the center of Rochester. Get off at Exit 42 and head south for about three miles. It is on the left. The building is a cross between a barn and an auditorium, with theater-style seating for about 120, and interesting items on display for sale at future auctions. Joe Hessney auctions off whatever will sell: antiques, farm equipment, guns, building materials. He is an old-timey auctioneer, with the fastest mouth in Western New York. At first I had trouble following the action, but with more exposure, I learned to follow it, and no longer found myself raising my own high bid.

The Stamp and Coin Auctions are held about every six weeks or two months, on a Saturday morning, doors open at 9:00 AM; stamp auction starts at 9:30 and coin auction at 10:00. The stamp and coin auctions are wild. Bargains and disasters are there side by side for the taking. Beware of fakes, overgrades, and auction fever! He does the stamps first, by going around the room to tables with about 12 lots on each of them. The high bid wins the right to select whichever lot one wants from the table. Bidding is repeated until the table is empty, and then he moves on to the next table. Big bargains to be had in stamps! Then the coin auction; there are between 250 and 300 lots, and it takes two or more hours even with Joe's rapid-fire, non-stop action. One may view the coins beforehand. They are in cases, and a helpful staffer will bring any coin out for close inspection.

There is a lot of high quality material at Hessney's—a lot of junk as well. But the grading is highly suspect. Many coins are slabbed, but some of these are from "generic" slabbing companies, whose standards are loose, to say the least. Other coins are graded by the seller, and yet others by Hessney's staff. Overgrading is rampant—Buyer Beware!

I have seen crowds there ranging from about 30 to 60. Rochester seems strangely under-represented. People go there to buy, and bidding is active. Most of the bidders look like they really know what they are doing. Bidders must register and receive a placard with a bidding number. Then he charges the buyer 10% of the hammer price if payment is cash or check, and 13% if credit card.

If you wish to sell at Hessney's, you leave the stuff with him on week days and he charges you a 15% seller's fee on sale. So Joe makes out OK.

Joe doesn't accept a minimum bid or reserve from the seller. He arbitrarily sets the opening bid himself. ("I want fifty dollars for this fine Morgan.... "50-50-50-50"). Typically nobody bids at the opening price, so after about half a second he drops it by half ("I want 25-25-25") and in another half a second down again: ("10-10-10"). Then the bidding starts and quickly rises past his opening price. If no one bids, he goes down to one dollar! Almost everything sells. He starts with the American half cents, and then marches up through all denominations. There are lots of Morgans. He usually has some American gold. After the gold, he sells foreign material, proof sets, currency, rolls, boxes of coins, and a hodge-podge of material, and the auction sort of peters out with items of generally lesser value and interest. But be advised, the closer to the end of the auction the faster he goes! His auction delivery is something to behold! You can follow the action on a printed Auction Catalogue and on closed circuit TVs if you are fast enough.

**Here are the numbers** from three auctions for which I have data:

Total number of items	812
Sale %	99%
No Sale %	1%

Price range of sales	\$1 to \$10,000
Number of lots sold at greater than \$1,000	5
Total Take, including the \$10,000 coin	\$81,101; average \$27,034
Total Take, excluding the \$10,000 coin	\$71,101; average \$23,700
Average price per lot, including the \$10,000 coin	\$100
Average price per lot, excluding the \$10,000 coin	\$88

In Part II I will report my analysis of both auctions. This will include the quality of the offerings in more depth, the advantages of being a buyer or a seller, some buying and selling strategies, and my own experience as both buyer and seller in both auctions.

In Part III I will attempt to address the questions that I asked in the first paragraph about the RNA Auction. Is it broken? Is it good for buyers or sellers? Is there anything that we should do to fix it? My suggestions have not been formulated yet. I invite your commentary and will rely heavily on your opinions, which I expect to receive plentifully and forcefully.

\* \* \* \* \*

## RNA News

Established January 1912

One of America's oldest local  
coin clubs  
American Numismatic  
Association,  
Branch #2,  
Life Club #8

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Association, Canadian Numismatic  
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Science Center

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**Numismatist of the Year:** Nominations for this honor must be made in writing no later than the first meeting in March 2012 to the committee chairperson (immediate past RNA President Peter Blaisdell). A copy of the guidelines for the selection committee and qualifications for nominees may be obtained by email from the Associate Editor, *RNA News*. The award cannot be made to an individual more than once. Past awardees:

1988 – 1989	Gerard E. Muhl	2000 – 2001	None
1989 – 1990	None	2001 – 2002	None
1990 – 1991	Douglas G. Borden	2002 – 2003	None
1991 – 1992	John Jay Pittman	2003 – 2004	Scott D. Fybush
1992 – 1993	William David Coe	2004 – 2005	None
1993 – 1994	None	2005 – 2006	Mitchell Sanders
1994 – 1995	Charles J. Ricard	2006 – 2007	None
1995 – 1996	Robert Edward Doty	2007 – 2008	None
1996 – 1997	John E. Zabel	2008 – 2009	Andrew Harkness
1997 – 1998	Arthur D. Cohen	2009 – 2010	Carmen J. (Chip) Scoppa II
1998 – 1999	Ursula Loose	2010 – 2011	Timothy Corio
1999 – 2000	None		

\* \* \* \* \*

RNA Trivia: Which RNA President missed 22 of 24 regular club meetings while President? Answer on page 7.

## How to beat the High Price of Gold

By Gerard Muhl

While hiking in the Adirondacks some time ago I encountered an elderly holocaust survivor on vacation from his job as violinist for the New York Philharmonic. We got to talking and it turned out that he was augmenting his musician's salary by panning for gold. This was by Cold Brook near Mt. Marcy.

Surely you can't be earning much by your labors, I said. He confessed that that week he did poorly in his search, having found only a little over an ounce. Flash ahead thirty years and that weekly ounce doesn't sound so bad. If he could do that every week, and at \$1,400 an ounce, the musician would take back to New York City \$72,000 a year!

Interested, I did a search of the literature and found some stories about gold fever in New York State. *The New York Times* on July 27, 1880 reported that claims for discoveries of gold mines in the Adirondacks were filed almost daily in the Secretary of State's office. It noted that the Fonda, Jamestown, and Gloversville Railroad had employed a geologist to search for gold veins, and that he reported several having been discovered. "They are said to promise very rich yields."

The *Times* went on to report that in Wellstown (now Wells, New York) a mine was being worked by a company from Wisconsin that was paying well. The company was reported to be realizing \$150 of gold for every ton of ore it extracted.

The *Times* on August 16, 1883 reported that nearly 500 claims of gold discoveries had been made in northern New York, most near Lake Pleasant and Gloversville. By 1898 over 3,000 claims were filed with the State. Some, of course, must have been wishful thinking but others may actually have found some of the golden metal. In the *Geology of New York* section of the New York State Museum in Albany are samples on display of nuggets and flakes of gold found in the North Country.

Is there gold still to be found? At least forty people think the answer is yes. Between 1985 and 1990 they each paid \$500 to the state to stake a gold claim. Probably the gold is not in sufficient quantities to call for commercial exploitation. However, who can say that a few ounces might not turn up in a miner's gold pan.

Panning is good exercise and furthermore you don't need expensive equipment. A Google search will reveal a number of gold panning manuals along with guides to test what you find to prove that it really is gold.

Perhaps the most promising places to dip your pan in the waters are: near North Lake and Ice Cave Brook, in the area of Sacandaga River and Moose River; or near Gloversville (Wells and Lake Pleasant).

In the area 16 miles north and 9 miles west of Northville there were at one time five gold mines in operation (Benson Mining, West Stony Creek Mining, Adirondack Mining, Albany Mining, and the Fulton and Hamilton County Mining Company).

It's a beautiful area of the state for hiking and camping. The air is clear and fresh, and if you go and find a few ounces of gold it's an extra. Good luck and bring your story of treasure to an RNA meeting.

We need your Article for upcoming newsletters. Earn Fame; win a writers medal. Tell us a numismatic experience; write about a favorite coin or series. How about a biography of a worthy numismatist? Send articles to Gerry (and email them to Ted).

\* \* \* \* \*

### Club News and Notes

Since the **January - February** issue of *RNA News*, the following people have joined RNA: We welcome Michael Riedlinger of Rochester, NY.

The RNA 1912-2012 *One Hundred Years of Friendship* Anniversary Medal is still available. It is solid bronze, two and a half inches in diameter, with an antique finish. The plaster models for making the dies were created by former US Mint designer/engraver Tom Rogers. The cost for the medal is \$28 at a regular RNA

meeting or via mail by sending \$31 to RNA c/o Gerry Muhl, 50 Rogers Parkway, Rochester, NY 14617. The final mintage is: 200 in bronze; 10 in 100 gm fine silver; and three in six ounce fine gold.

**RNA 100th Anniversary** lapel pins and elongated coins will be available at regular meetings for a period of time. The pins are \$4 (\$5 by mail). The elongated nickels are \$1 (by mail also; add a self-addressed stamped envelope.) Send orders to Bill Coe, Box 16444, Rochester, NY 14616.

The John Jay Pittman Memorial Library is available at every regular meeting. There are over one thousand titles to pick from. See the RNA Librarian to sign out materials you wish to borrow.

Information for ordering the book "Best of the RNA Collection" should be available in our next issue.

Did you borrow a book from Gerry Muhl recently? He's looking for his copy of *Coins of the Bible* (Arthur Friedberg, 2004) and *Curious Currency* (Robert Leonard, Jr., 2010).

RNA is sponsoring a coin exhibit from our collection during the entire month of April on the third floor of the Rundel Library (new building) in downtown Rochester (South Avenue at Broad Street).

If you were an RNA officer and even have scraps of old meeting minutes, the club Historian is looking for you. Many RNA minutes are missing from the 1970's through 1990's. See or call Gerry Muhl if you can help complete this project.

We want to see you at our annual past Presidents Banquet this May. The location this year is Rick's Prime Rib House. If you cannot attend and cannot pick up your 2011 presidential medal at a meeting, please send \$3 for postage to the Treasurer.

Would you like to meet with other RNA members for lunch once a month? Bring your thoughts to a meeting.

If we are to sponsor a meeting of Western NY coin clubs in May/June we will need a coordinator. Please let President Chip Scoppa know if you are willing to take on this project.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Here is a poem** written in 1934 by RNA President Charlie Foster. Even though written at the height of the Great Depression, President Foster kept his sense of humor:

A sheep, a frog, a duck, a skunk  
 To market went one day; to buy some food,  
 And all but one had means wherewith to pay.  
 The sheep possessed four quarters,  
 While the frog a greenback had; the duck a bill;  
 But the only (s)cent the poor skunk owned  
 Was very, very bad!

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\* \* \* \* \*

**RNA Trivia** answer: Fred E. Merritt in 1917. Before he took office he moved to Philadelphia. Because of his long service to the club, members elected him President anyway. He presided over two meetings while on summer vacation in Rochester during July and August.

\* \* \* \* \*

Regular RNA meetings are held on the first and third Thursdays of every month, except July and August, at the Eisenhart Auditorium of the Rochester Museum & Science Center, 657 East Avenue. The auditorium is the glass front building behind the Museum. Enter through the Eisenhart or Gannett School doors and follow the signs downstairs to the lower-level meeting room. All are welcome! If you have difficulty with stairs ask the receptionist in the auditorium for elevator directions.

Rochester Junior Numismatic Association (RJNA) meetings are also held in the lower level meeting room at Eisenhart Auditorium; for more information, call RJNA advisor Joe Lanzafame at 585-314-1240 for more information.

## The Calendar **March - April 2012**

- **Thursday, March 1:** 8PM - RNA Meeting: **Chip Scoppa** - Roman Holiday; **Scavenger Hunt - Results**
- **Thursday, March 15:** 8PM - RNA Meeting: **John Lighthouse** - The Other "D"
- **Friday, March 16:** RJNA Meeting
- **Thursday, April 5:** 8PM - RNA Meeting: **George Fekete** - Bitcoin
- **Thursday, April 19:** 8PM - RNA Meeting: **Susie Scoppa** - Roman Ladies
- **Friday, April 20:** RJNA Meeting
- **Thursday, May 3:** 8PM - RNA Meeting: **Jason Childers** - Euro Coins III
- **Thursday, May 17:** 8PM - RNA Meeting: **Meinhart Speaking Contest**
- **Friday, May 18:** RJNA Meeting
- **Friday, May 18: RNA Annual Banquet:** honoring past President **Peter Blaisdell** at Rick's Prime Rib House, 6pm
- **Sunday, August 26:** RNA Annual Picnic: Save the date

- \* Rochester Area Coin Expo: next show is March 11, 10-3, at the Double Tree Hotel, 1111 Jefferson Road.
- \* The Ontario County Coin Club meets at 2 pm on the first Sunday of every month at the Canandaigua Elks Club, 19 Niagara Street. Doors open at 1 pm.

The Calendar welcomes meeting notices from other area clubs. Send to Gerry Muhl or email Ted at tedvacc@yahoo.com.

**Rochester Numismatic Association**  
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